Medical Missionary

Winter 1970

Missions.....in mission.....missionaries.....mission countries

. . . . . we stumble over the words, not quite sure anymore just how to define them. No doubt, there is a reality — the Good News not preached to many, the Good News not fully grasped by any of us, the Good News ignored on all sides. But it is no longer a matter of geography, nor of the "have's" and "have-nots". Rather, it is **a common task we all share,** a process of liberation calling out to each man, each culture, each nation.

In this issue of the magazine we hope to explore some of the dimensions of mission as we Medical Mission Sisters see it in a 1970 world.

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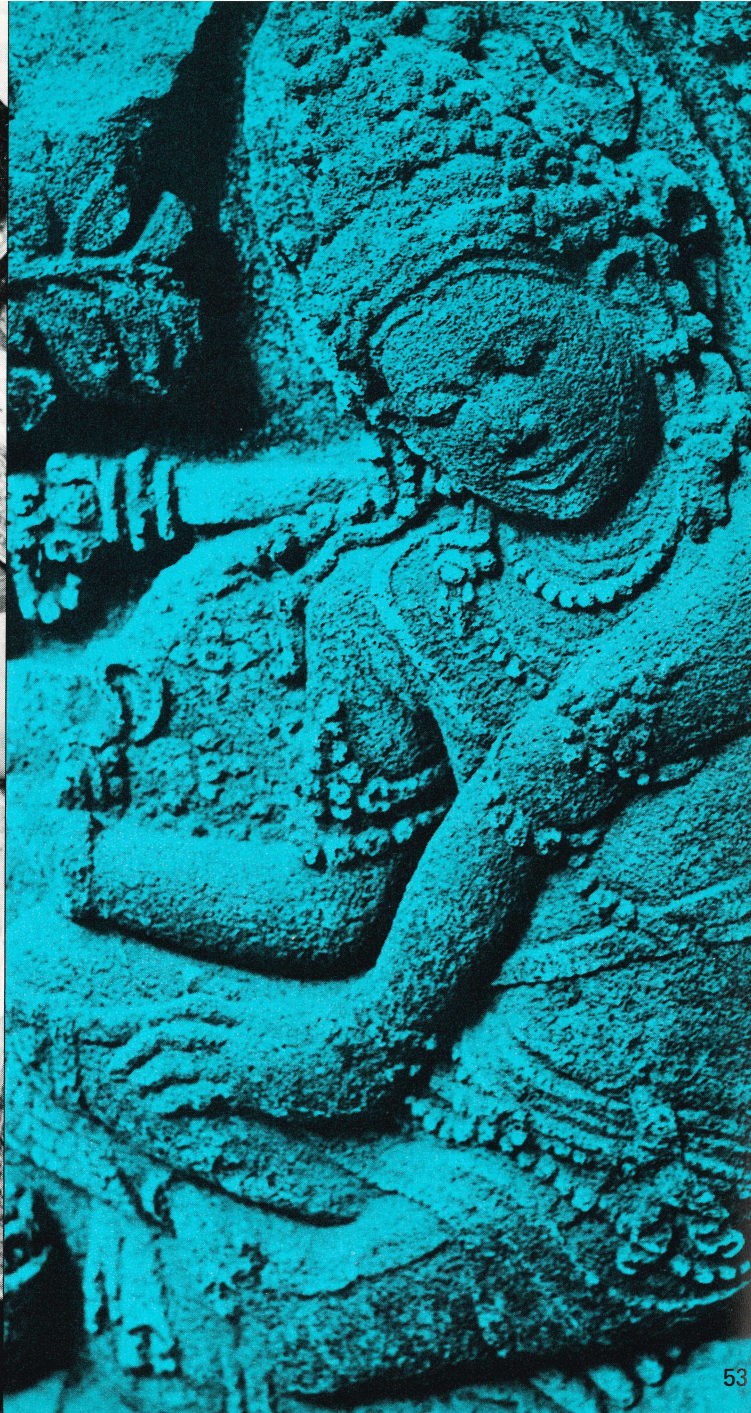
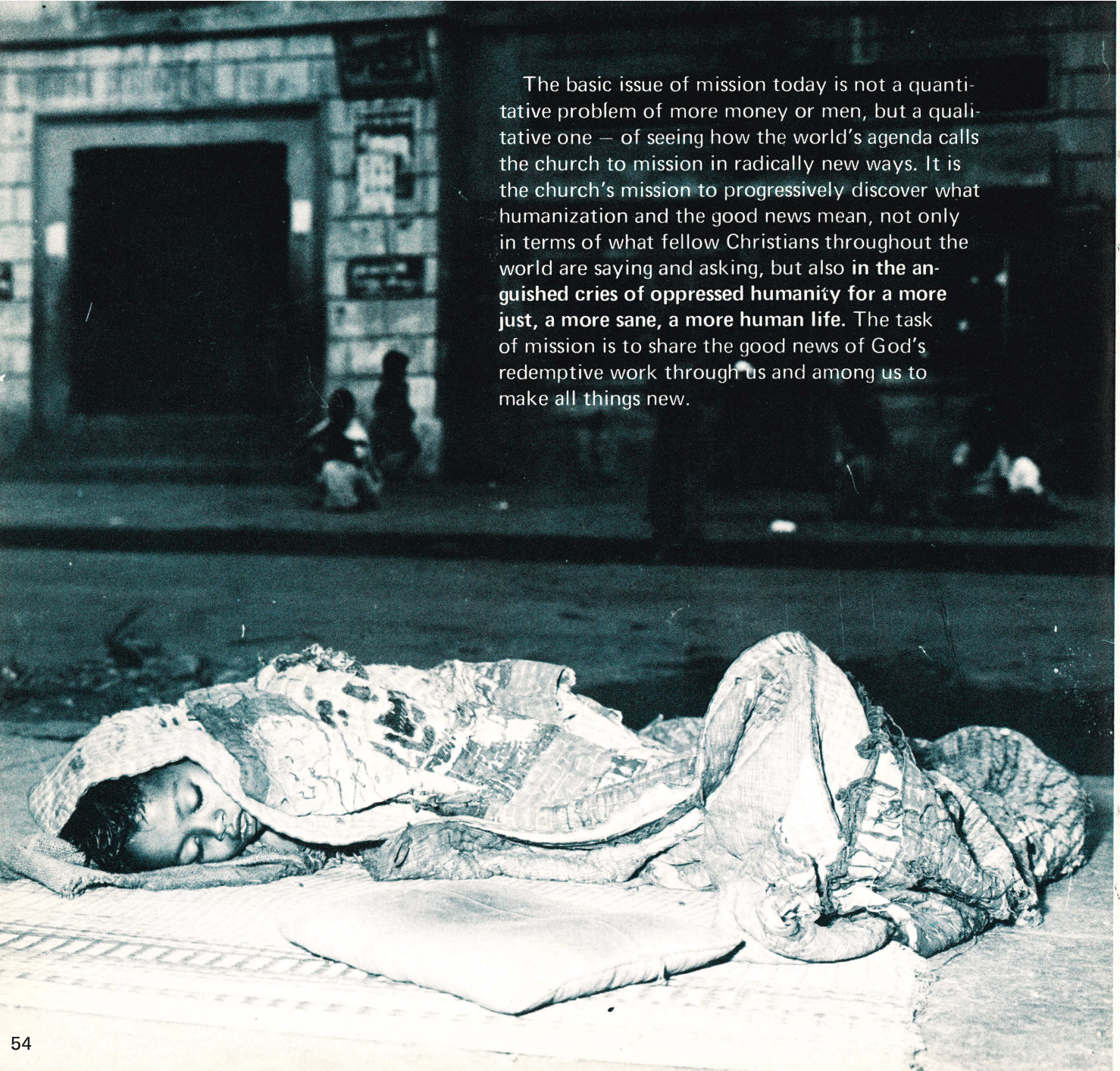
Today, there are many who too glibly assume that Western technology, Western values and Western religious and political institutions are gradually penetrating the rest of the world, and that it is only a matter of time before all societies are made more or less in the Western image. The resurgence of traditional non-Western cultures belies this assumption. **There is a power and authenticity in the Third World which will come to ever fuller expression despite what at the present time seems to be the growing dominance of Western society.** This is evident not only in intense nationalism but also **in the revival of many religions thought dead or anachronistic;** it is evident also **in flourishing art, drama and music.** The real struggle of our time is not between Russia and the U.S.A. but between the more materially developed regions and the less materially advanced. The Third World is not what lies outside capitalism and socialism. It is not a geographic concept at all. Rather it is "the next possibility of history, a thrust, a counter-culture.





The basic issue of mission today is not a quantitative problem of more money or men, but a qualitative one – of seeing how the world's agenda calls the church to mission in radically new ways. It is the church's mission to progressively discover what humanization and the good news mean, not only in terms of what fellow Christians throughout the world are saying and asking, but also **in the anguished cries of oppressed humanity for a more just, a more sane, a more human life.** The task of mission is to share the good news of God's redemptive work through us and among us to make all things new.

Many traditional conceptions of mission are no longer adequate — any conception which rests upon a body count; any conception which insists upon developing a worshipping community which uses all the cultural accretions of Western Christendom; any conception which develops enclaves of Christians unrelated to the dynamics of the society in which they are set. When we move back to the Bible to find what are the basic marks of mission, we find staring us in the face from book to book the central notions of **celebration of life** and **service to man, in the name of God, to liberate man.** This liberation is not only from external shackles imposed on man by nature or society, but also liberation from his own self-centeredness and sin. This liberation is seen not only in individualistic terms, but in communitarian ones as well.

We still tend to stereotype mission activity as in some exotic remote overseas jungle. But **mission has to do also with the jungles** of our own personal and social life; it has to do with the permeation of all aspects of our corporate life with the questions of liberation and of humanization. "Mission to six continents" is an important and popular phrase which reminds us of the reciprocal growth which is possible through real ecumenicity.

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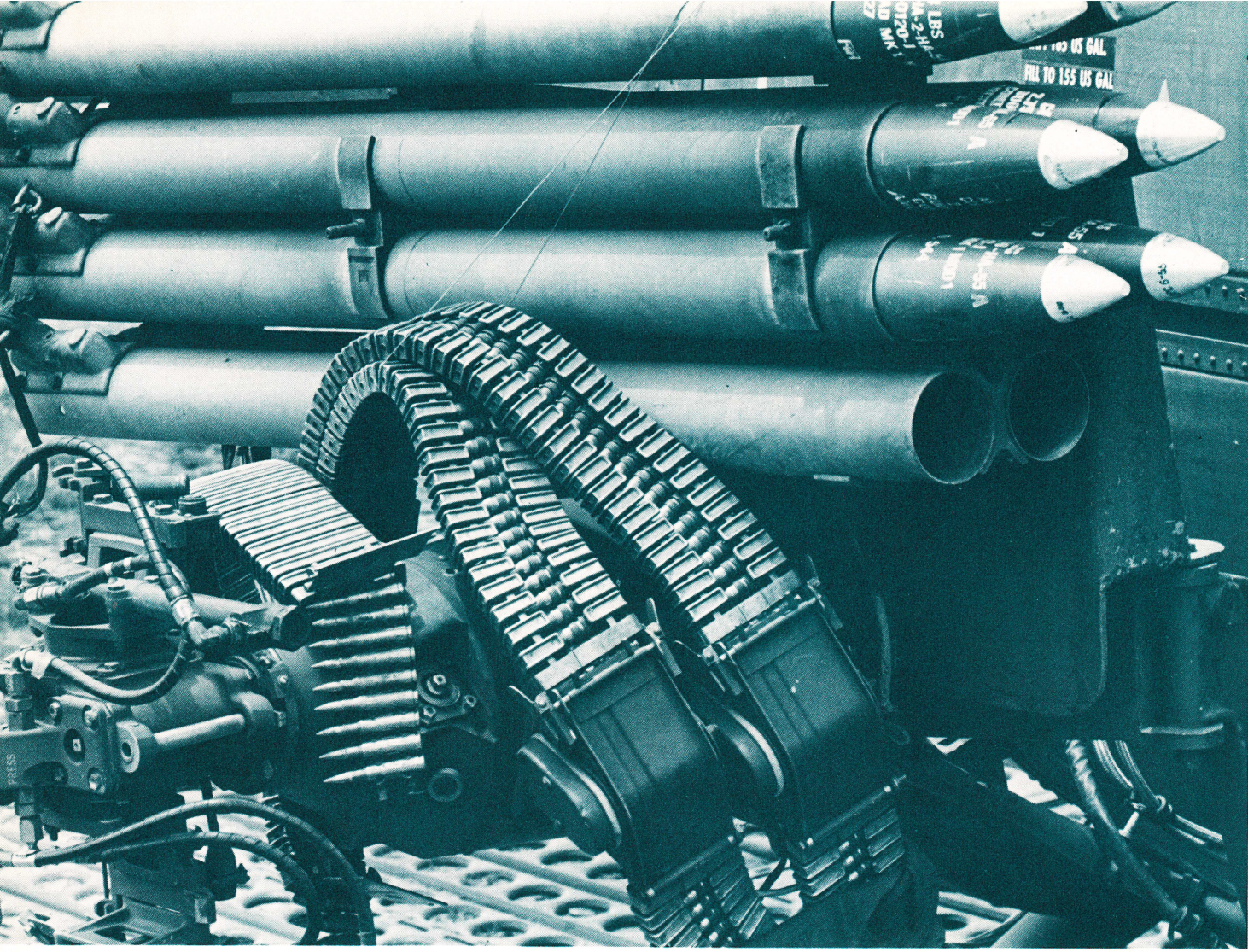

Judged by the insensitivity of the affluent to the desperate plight of the poor, one could say that the most materially developed peoples tend to be the ones most in need of

real humanization. Mission has to do then, not only with ALL peoples of the globe, but also with ALL dimensions of human life and institutions – the economic order, **political life, family life,** and institutional church life itself.

If mission is bringing to bear the Good News on all aspects of personal and corporate life, it has to do with liberating man from hunger, deprivation, ignorance, powerlessness, and imprisonment in the idolatrous structures of his own existence. Liberation has to do with giving man a transcendent reference, a sense of being free from others' control, **a sense of being responsible for his own decisions and his own destiny, free to accept the anxiety and ambiguities of finiteness.** Conditions of life which enslave and humiliate him are an offense to the God who called every man to dignity and freedom. Institutions and social patterns which permit gross disparities between people, such as those which exist between the rich and poor in the world, prevent both liberation and community.

Service is a part of mission in its broadest sense. Christians have a special mission to the oppressed of the earth, not only out of compassion, which easily slides into paternalism and self-righteousness, but because it is through the oppressed of the earth that we begin to sense the arrogance of every established power. The oppressed of the earth help us to keep alive our sense of the ambiguity and paradox of all human achievements; help us to keep alive the sense of judgment upon all human successes; **help us to keep sensitive to the love and compassion by which every hesitant achievement of justice is to be judged.** Servanthood and service are not only means through which the church expresses itself but also the means through which the church discovers herself anew every day.

The task of mission is to be a sharer of life at its deepest levels. The missionary must expect to discover signs of the grace of God and the continuing creative activity of God in the life of those with whom he lives, not something he imports, but finds there. The task of the missionary is to engage the life of others at the deepest possible levels — **to sense where the hurt is in the life of another, to find where the joy and affirmations are,**

to discover where the deepest questions are about the meaning and mystery of life. The task of the missionary is to meet others at the boundary situations where mutual growth can take place, at the frontiers of the mystery and purpose of life itself. Is it not at such frontier situations where all men have to live in trust and risk and hope? Is it not there that missionaries can engage not another religion as an abstract body of rules and beliefs and traditions, but another person with the same profound questions about the nature and destiny of his life and of man?

The preceding statements are taken from a paper "Mission Response to Local Communities", delivered by Mr. Richard Dickinson of the Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana, at a mission conference at the Bergamo Center, Dayton, Ohio, in May, 1970.

it gets awfully lonely,
lonely; like screaming
screaming lonely
screaming down dream alley,
screaming like none can hear;
but you hear me
clear
and loud:
like it's for you
I scream.

A South African poet captures a moment in the history of perhaps every human heart. It gets awfully lonely sometimes. Life becomes void of meaning because ignorance or sickness or death challenge the spirit of a man or a people to hope in the future and to continue to work for it. It is here in that moment of isolation and purposelessness that a man needs to scream and he needs to be heard.

A Christian Missionary is a listener . . . by profession. He had to open up the ears of his heart in the first place to catch the call of God within his personality and talents and ambitions. He should be so attuned to his own needs and limitations that he readily recognizes the scream of those in others. And he, of all people, should have the time to sit in the marketplace or on the back porch or by a sick bed to listen to the loneliness of another and melt it with his gentle, caring presence.

When we think of "mission" today we must constantly expand our previously static conceptions. Words and phrases like "Apollo mission to the moon," the television program "Mission Impossible" and the solemn "good will missions" of sundry world leaders give the term new connotations. A mission is the sending forth of a few to represent the many in a project of communication and service. The astronauts represent the planet earth in the exploration of the moon and other heavenly bodies of the universe. The Peace Corps workers represent their respective countries in the service and education of other people. A Christian missionary no less receives his commission from a source other than himself — — the Christian community — — and he endeavors to fit in and be of service to the community that receives him, whatever land and culture. Any way one

looks at it, mission means communication, dialogue, sharing. Its ultimate success is the unification of man with himself, with his fellow men, and with God.

We Medical Mission Sisters have a mission. It is built into our very existence. We are Christians, committed to the Gospel values of hope and love and peace for all men. We live together as a community of religious women to support and strengthen one another and to insure the permanence of the commission we have been given by Christ and by the Christian community in America, Europe, Africa and Asia. Our medical work in 19 countries is founded on the premise that health is a universal human right, and not the privilege of a few. Our knowledge and skill in the various medical professions obligates us to the sick and the poor we encounter. Their claim on us is personal as well as professional because their need to be healed meets our need to serve. It is a people-gathering, friendship-building work. And it is with our own respectful concern and service that we provide credibility to the news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Mission means communication. What do we have to say to the pregnant women in India, to the malnourished children in Malawi, to the old rice growers in Vietnam? We tell them that they as persons and as a nation with a unique cultural heritage are worth something, are called to contribute to the development and unity of mankind. We tell them that the goals of health and progress are in their own hands and we teach them how to use their hands. We tell them that death is not the end, that we know of one man, Jesus Christ, who has returned from the dead and that such is the destiny of the rest of us. Mission is also a dialogue. The people we serve have something to say to us. They tell us that technology is not everything; that western Christianity does not exhaust the entire religious quest of man; that the division among Christians is a scandal to the Gospel they profess.

Yes, as Teilhard de Chardin put it, "The age of nations is past. Our task now if we would not perish is to build the earth." Mission

today is a worldwide endeavor. And we Christians who claim to have the key to the unity and peace of man in Jesus Christ must get into the mainstream of activity. We must realize that we have no "corner on the market", that there are others in the field working for the progress of man. We must work for and with all efforts to bring peace, to share knowledge, to end suffering. And the world will know we are Christians by the love we have for one another and by the wholeheartedness with which we live.

I hear many voices
like it's said a madman hears;
maybe I'm a madman
I'm a medicine man.
Maybe I'm mad
for the voices are luring me,
urging me
from the midnight moon
and the silence of my desk
to walk on wave crests
across a sea.

(Gabriel Okara, Nigerian Poet)

by Sister Kristine Malins

Be on the lookout for a new format for the MEDICAL MISSIONARY in 1971.

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